In This Together: Mayor Jacob Frey Inaugural Address

*Minneapolis City Hall  
January 8, 2018*

***"When we succeed, we succeed together. And when things get tough, we will stay at the table. We are in this together."***

***"Just weeks from today, the eyes of the world will turn to Minneapolis to be entertained for a few short hours during the Super Bowl. What they will see is a city united — united around the values of opportunity, inclusion, and justice."***

Good morning, Minneapolis!

Thank you, everyone, for being here today — including my parents. Mom: Everything I am, I am because of you. Dad: Everything I aspire to be, it’s because you showed me how to dream bigger. To my extraordinary wife Sarah Clarke: Thank you for being my love, my ever-present advocate. I love you.

I also want to thank my predecessor Mayor Betsy Hodges. Minneapolis is stronger for your focus on equity and for your twelve years of public service. And to all the candidates who ran for Mayor: You’ve made me a better Mayor through the vigorous debate and ideas we exchanged over the last year. Our city benefits from your leadership.

Here with us today are my incredible colleagues on the City Council. I can tell you from experience that this City Council will be exceptional. They are forward-thinking, united in mentality, and ready to serve. I look forward to embarking on this amazing journey together.

Today, we come together to collectively recognize that the time for talk alone is over and progress cannot be achieved without a clear action-oriented approach. And Minneapolis: We can achieve remarkable things when we are justice-oriented and united.

Take James Cross, who helped establish Natives Against Heroin to improve the lives of people in Little Earth and across the state. He’s on the frontlines combating the opioid epidemic by engaging the community directly. And I’ll tell you what, he is saving lives.

The North Loop Neighborhood Association embraced change when they worked hand-in-hand with Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative to build affordable housing for people with a felony record. They responded to a moral question with the right policy. They didn’t simply allow new residents in their neighborhoods, they welcomed them with open arms, and they said Yes, in our backyard! That is the spirit of Minneapolis.

We have elected not one — but two trans Council Members of color. They made history last year and made Minneapolis proud by living their truths and encouraging others to do the exact same. Congratulations.

These are just some recent examples of how the people of Minneapolis have worked together for the betterment of their communities.

That’s what today is about — coming together, uniting around a shared vision, and charting a course that quite simply improves people’s lives. If we work together, Minneapolis can be a city where every ward and every neighborhood is defined by opportunity. Our history is marked by moments proving that this is achievable.

From harnessing the industrial might of the Mississippi River, to emerging as the Midwest’s top incubator for new businesses, to our Somali community’s newly-formed Opportunity Center in Cedar Riverside — Minneapolis has seized opportunity, embraced change, and pushed for progress. It’s that reputation that has made our city stand out as an international hub for new Americans and refugees, as a safe haven for the LGBT community, and a home for innovative businesses. It’s that reputation that has made our city and region home to 17 Fortune 500 Companies.

But we know that it’s been too long since the last Fortune 500 established their headquarters in Minneapolis. And there’s a clear reason for that.

Our population is becoming more diverse — communities of color are growing — but we’re not knocking down the barriers to their ability to scale. This is not a symptom of our deficiencies — it is the reason why our deficiencies persist. We talk about access but we know that that as a region we are excluding professionals of color and failing to utilize minority owned businesses.

So yes, we must confront today’s challenges head on. And our challenges are real. The very first challenge we are addressing head on is expanding access to affordable housing throughout our city.

Affordable Housing

We are in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. We’ve lost 10,000 units of affordable housing in the last ten years, and our city stands on a history of intentional segregation. We have maps in City Hall identifying North Minneapolis as a “slum” occupied by our black and Jewish communities. It’s that kind of intentional segregation that divides communities and ideas. It is that kind of intentional segregation that restrains our economic growth, prevents inclusion, and hinders the exchange of ideas necessary for our modern day success stories.

We didn’t get here by accident. So we can’t expect to address these problems without solutions that match the precision of the harm inflicted.

I campaigned on the premise that a strong commitment to racial justice includes a strong commitment to investing in affordable housing. And we promised that the affordable housing would not be limited to areas that already have a high concentration of it. Affordable housing should be in every neighborhood because everyone has the right to live in a great city. And in our great city we don’t push certain communities aside, we welcome them in.

How can we begin to make things right?

Well first, it’s cheaper to preserve an existing unit than it is to make a new one. So we need to retain and preserve the affordable housing that exists.

Second, we need to produce new affordable housing. And as we create new housing, it can’t only be available at 50 and 60 percent of Area Median Income. We need deeply affordable housing at thirty percent of Area Median Income. Too many of our neighbors are experiencing homelessness because of a lack of deeply affordable housing. There are people who don’t have an opportunity to go home at night, shut the door on the world, and rejuvenate for the next day with the comfort in one simple phrase: “I am safe in my home.”

All we need is the political will.

Right now a huge percentage of our homeless population is working. They are working! But they can’t make up the gap between the cost of a shelter and the cost of the deepest affordable housing in our city. We are perpetually keeping them trapped in a cycle of homelessness because we have not provided that next rung on the ladder that would allow them to pull themselves out.

Not only is this inhumane and inequitable — it’s a bad financial decision. It costs three times as much to keep a person homeless, on the streets, cycling through hospital stays, shelter, and sometimes jail than it does to just give them a home.  Enough is enough. Let’s make this commitment: If you believe that everyone deserves the safety and security of a home, then, I want you to speak up with me: *Housing is a right*.

In the richest nation the world has ever seen, in a city where cranes fill our skyline, nobody should live under a bridge. And nobody should worry about where they’ll rest their head at night.

We also know that unscrupulous landlords will increase rents while putting people’s health and safety at risk. We know that immigrants and refugees are disproportionately impacted — especially those who are not documented. I’m here to tell you that our collective human thriving depends on our immigrant population just as it always has; I’m here to tell you that we must stand up for tenants in our city.

If we commit to expanding affordable housing throughout our city, we’ll usher in an era where we finally embrace living among people who look different from ourselves. And yes, an era where all of our city’s families can thrive.

I mentioned earlier that our Jewish community was intentionally segregated. That was just one chapter in a longer history that led to the infamous declaration that Minneapolis was the “capital of anti-Semitism in the United States.” Today a Jewish man is delivering this speech as your Mayor. Not long ago, I would have been redlined out and denied employment in many places.

More recently, police raids of gay bars and arrests for the sake of outing people in adult bookstores were commonplace. And then six years ago, Minneapolis was at the center of the successful drive to make marriage equality state law.

I tell you this not to celebrate how far we’ve come, but to show you that when we chart a shared path forward, we can achieve great things.

Police-Community Relations

We have high goals for improving community-police relations.

Events of the past several years have tested our city in ways that are new to some neighborhoods but are all too familiar to others. Strained relations between law enforcement officials and the communities they serve—especially communities of color—have exacted a toll on the very soul of our city, our region, and this nation. As a former civil rights attorney, I know that allowing a system of racial injustice to remain in place damages our shared sense of humanity: the instinct to do right by one another suffers, the trust that holds our neighborhoods together is eroded, and it’s not just the victim or the individual who pays for it , the entirety of Minneapolis pays.

Jamar Clark’s family knows this pain. Don Damond and Justine Damond’s family know this pain. Valerie Castile, Allysza Castile, and Diamond Reynolds know this pain. Generations of families throughout our city’s history have known this pain.

As your mayor, I will make damn sure that I do everything in my power to help heal that pain and strengthen police-community relations not just through conversations but by working with you and our law enforcement agencies to enact policies that protect and serve the people of our city. Our law enforcement officials answer the call — day or night — regardless of the risk. We need to be working directly with them to ensure that they are in the right frame of mind, have access to wellness training, and can be their best versions of self.

And yes, accountability must be a priority. Accountability to the standards of the Minneapolis Police Department, and the Office of the Mayor, and the City Council. Most importantly, accountability to the community. That accountability comes in the form of shifting the culture of policing. Specifically, use of force should be reformed so that reasonable alternatives are used prior to resorting to deadly force.

And while we have a body camera policy, we know that the technology is of no use to anyone unless it’s turned on. Presently, far too often those cameras are not turned on. We should expect that an officer’s body camera is activated early when responding to a call. And in cases where we find a lack of evidence, it should not be due to an officer’s failure to activate their body camera.

So yes, we must expect more accountability from our police. But we also need to expect more of ourselves.

Elected leaders need to be accountable as well.

We need to recognize the reality that violent crime is up, especially shootings. We talk a lot about creating a culture of true community policing. Chief Arradondo and I believe that true community policing requires that our officers have the tools they need to succeed; to keep our neighborhoods safe; and to ensure our residents are treated with respect and dignity at every encounter.

Right now, our police are often running from 911 call to 911 call without the time to build strong relationships, to get to know the small business owners and residents, to get to know the kid walking down the street in his hoodie.

One way to fix that? Narrowing the beats of officers and putting them on consistent times and schedules, so they build positive relationships with the communities they serve. I want you to know your officers by name. In supporting our officers and expecting reform, I am confident that we have a committed partner in Chief Arradondo.

So, we need to set the stage for true community policing by strengthening our communities. And we can strengthen our communities by making sure all neighborhoods are sharing in the benefits of our growing economy.

Economic Inclusion & Diversity

I don’t care what the President says. In Minneapolis, we know that Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and our New American community makes us stronger, smarter and more globally competitive. While our city sits at three percent unemployment, we know that the number of unemployed and underemployed people of color continues to grow.

We stand on stolen land in a city and state with a long history of attacking and excluding our Indigenous and Black communities. Yet all too often, economic inclusion and diversity are treated as buzz words, and policies fall short of measurable progress. Too many neighborhoods have been cut off from our city’s prosperity and relegated to the margins.

For generations, People of Color and Indigenous People have played invaluable roles in building and sustaining our city through innovation, skilled labor, and blue collar work. They are some of our most influential thought leaders, artists, investors, and corporate executives. They are, have been and will increasingly be our Minneapolis. It is time that we embrace this reality fully.

Too much of our community experiences underemployment even while we have over 50,000 job openings in our market. Not only does this mean that our families are not living their greatest realities; this also means that by 2040 we will have left $31 BILLION dollars on the table in Minneapolis-St. Paul. I’m not sure you heard me: $31 billion of lost opportunity in our amazing market due to gaps between people of color and white people.

Any smart business person would agree that this would be an unacceptable loss. We want and need every dollar to invest in our education system, infrastructure and businesses so that our city is living up to its potential as an innovative platform of prosperity for all. That is what it takes to make sure our Minneapolis is globally competitive and that every segment of our community experiences the fullness of the prosperity that has been realized by so many. This, too, requires political will.

I am committed to ensuring that the success of Northeast and Downtown reaches every corner of our Minneapolis.

And you can expect that when business leaders approach the city they will be met with a team of city employees that will partner to move their business from concept to shovel. But, we won’t stop there. We will work with Council Members to design solutions ward by ward and we will partner with business leaders to ensure that the path forward builds a climate that earns their investments and supports our great city.

Are we going to grow? You bet we are. And we will grow in a way that champions communities traditionally left behind. Our business community knows the importance of growth through inclusion, too. We see this throughout our Minneapolis — from the investments along the Plymouth corridor in north Minneapolis to amazing transformation along Lake Street and Chicago Avenue, to partnerships between our regional and ethnic chambers of commerce.

This is what it takes. Our Minneapolis knows we must be united in action. When we succeed, we will celebrate together, and at every step we will innovate.

Regionalism & Cooperation

Minneapolis does not operate in a vacuum. We operate in a regional economy that drives the success of the entire state. We will collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions from Hennepin to Ramsey, from Bloomington to Edina, and up to Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park; from Minneapolis to Saint Paul. We are the Twin Cities, and I’m proud that Mayor Carter has joined us today.

And speaking of Mayor Carter, today is his birthday. Now, he recently told me that he’s never done anything on his birthday; but, he’s sitting here upfront in the second row. That’s a testament to a united Twin Cities. I think that deserves a celebration, and I think we should sing him a little happy birthday song. Please — everybody — join me in singing a very warm, Minneapolis-style happy birthday!

[*Happy Birthday sung to St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter*]

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So as you heard: When we sing, we sing together; when we succeed, we succeed together; and when things get tough, we will stay at the table. We are in this together.

Just weeks from today, the eyes of the world will turn to Minneapolis to be entertained for a few short hours during the Super Bowl. What they will see is a city united — united around the values of opportunity, inclusion, and justice. A city pushing to create a direct correlation between hard work and success. And a city of the future, that is emblematic of everything that our country can become.

We can be that city, and together we’ll make it happen.